

Success at School

Practising your English

Tom Sawyer
and other stories



Ladybird

Tom Sawyer



It was mid-afternoon in the deep south of America and the village of St Petersburg, near the Mississippi, was baking in the sun.

Aunt Polly was sitting by an open window, knitting. Soon the balmy summer air, the stillness, the scent of flowers and the murmuring of the bees made her nod off to sleep.

Outside the house Tom was looking at a board-fence thirty yards long and nine feet high. He had with him a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. Aunt Polly had given him the job as an afternoon's punishment for fighting.

The piece he had done already looked very small indeed compared with what was left. His spirits were very low. It would take hours to finish, maybe until dark. Just then Ben Rogers came into sight. As he reached Tom, he slowed down. Tom pretended not to notice him.

"Hello, you got to work?" asked Ben.

"Work, Ben! What do you call work?" said Tom.

"Why, ain't that work?"
Replied Ben.

Tom carried on whitewashing. "Maybe it is, but it suits me, Ben."

"Come on, you don't mean you like it, Tom?"

"Like it? Why not? A boy doesn't get a chance to whitewash a fence every day."

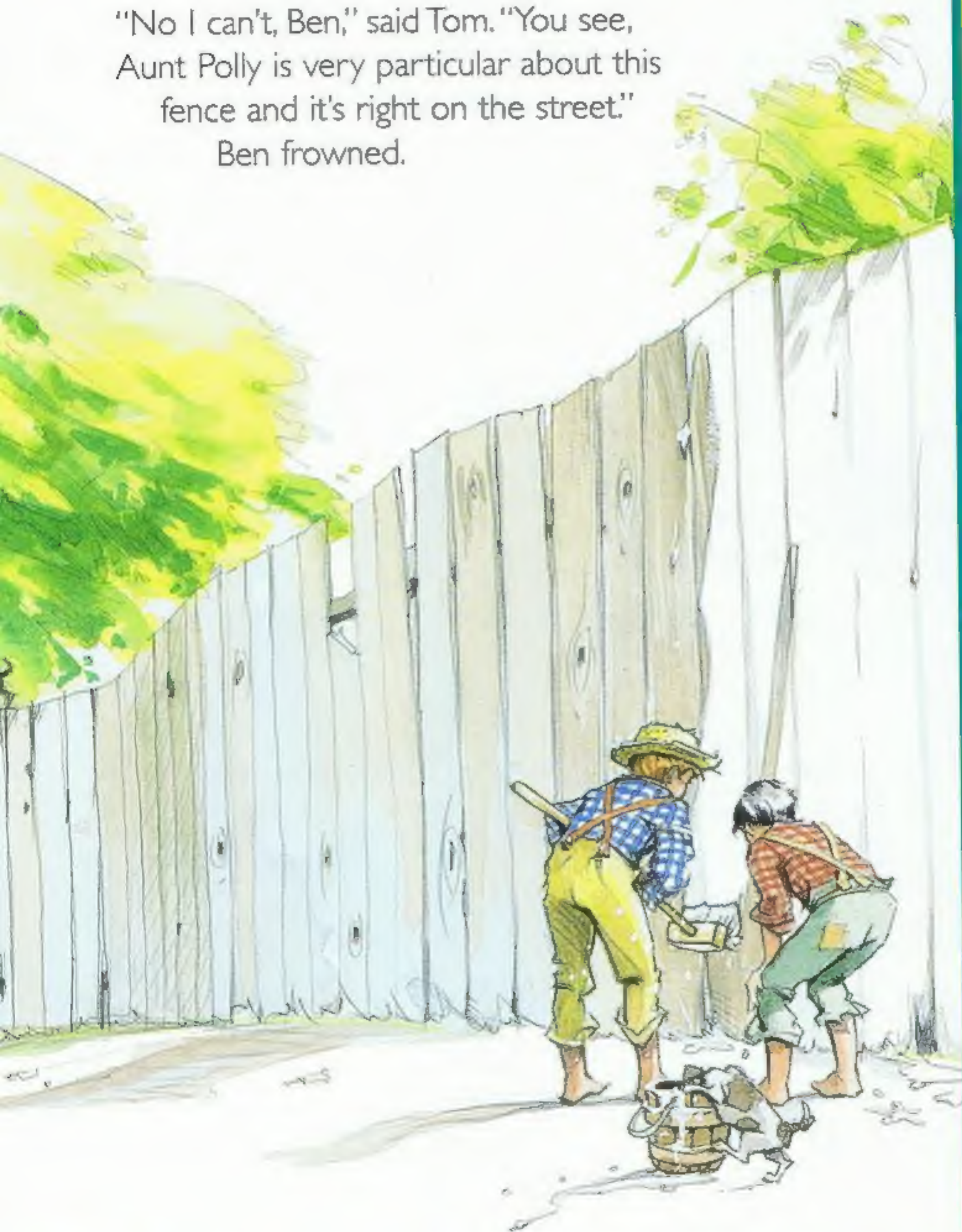
Ben watched every move as Tom swept the brush daintily back and forth, stopping every now and then to add a touch here and a touch there.



Ben got more and more interested. "Say, Tom. Let me do a little."

"No I can't, Ben," said Tom. "You see, Aunt Polly is very particular about this fence and it's right on the street."

Ben frowned.



"If it was at the back she wouldn't mind, and I wouldn't mind either," said Tom. "You see, I'm the only boy who can do it properly."

"Oh, shucks. I'll be real careful, Tom," said Ben. "She won't be able to tell, honest." So Tom gave Ben the brush and sat himself down to watch, eating the apple Ben had given him.

Soon other boys came along and when Ben became tired, Billy Fisher gave Tom a kite so that he could be allowed to take over. When Billy Fisher began to weaken, Johnny Miller gave Tom some blue bottle-glass so that he could carry on next.

By this time boys were standing in line waiting their turns and Tom had collected from them marbles, keys, a Jew's harp, chalk, glass stoppers, tadpoles, toy soldiers, a brass door knob, a knife and many other things.

When the fence was finished they started again and went on until the whitewash had all been used up. Then Tom went back into the house.

"May I go to play now, Aunt?" he asked.

"Have you finished the fence?" she replied.

"Yes. It's all done."

She didn't believe him and went outside to look for herself. "Well, I never! You can work Tom, when you have a mind to, but that's not often. Go along and play but don't be late back."

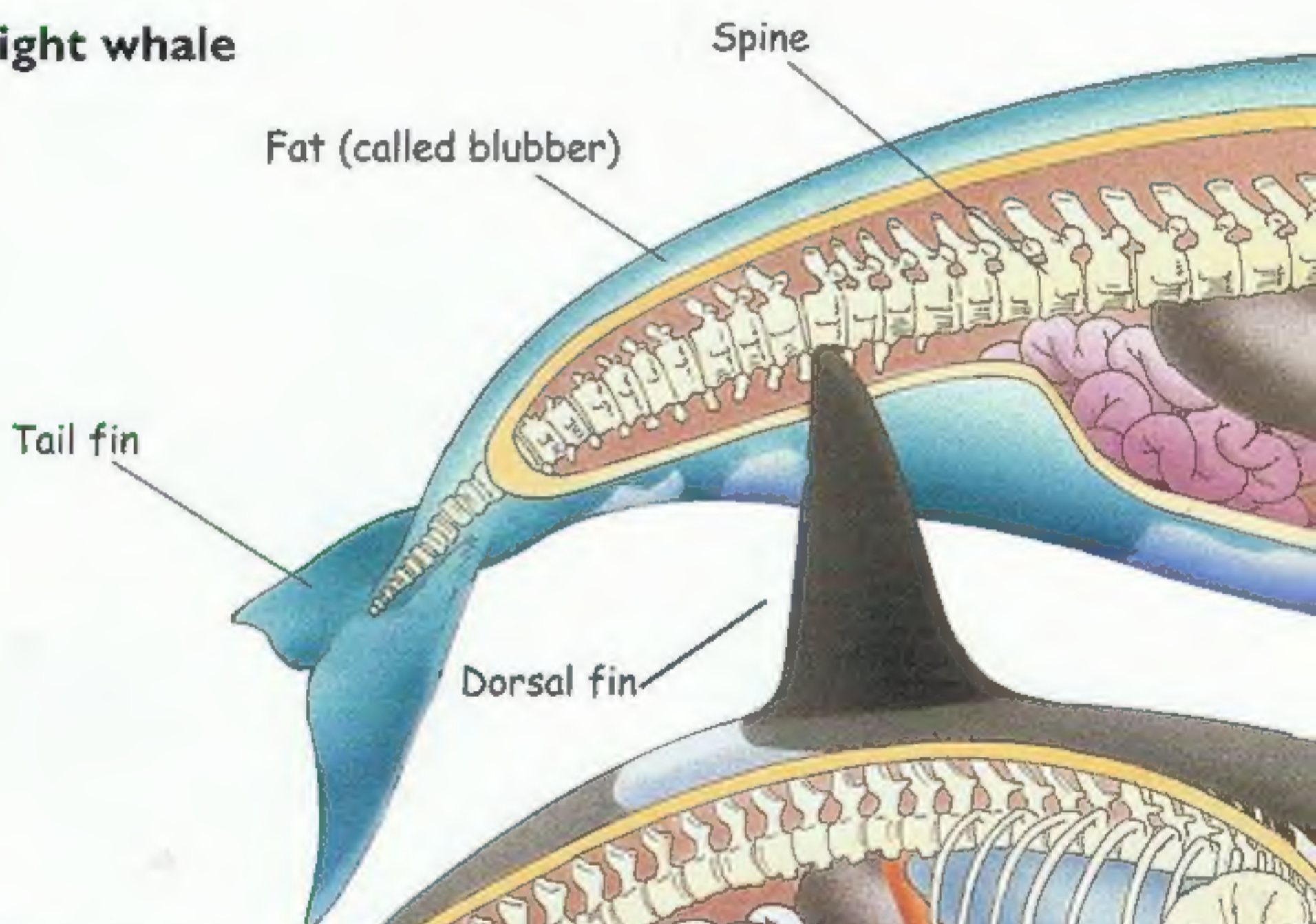


Whales and dolphins

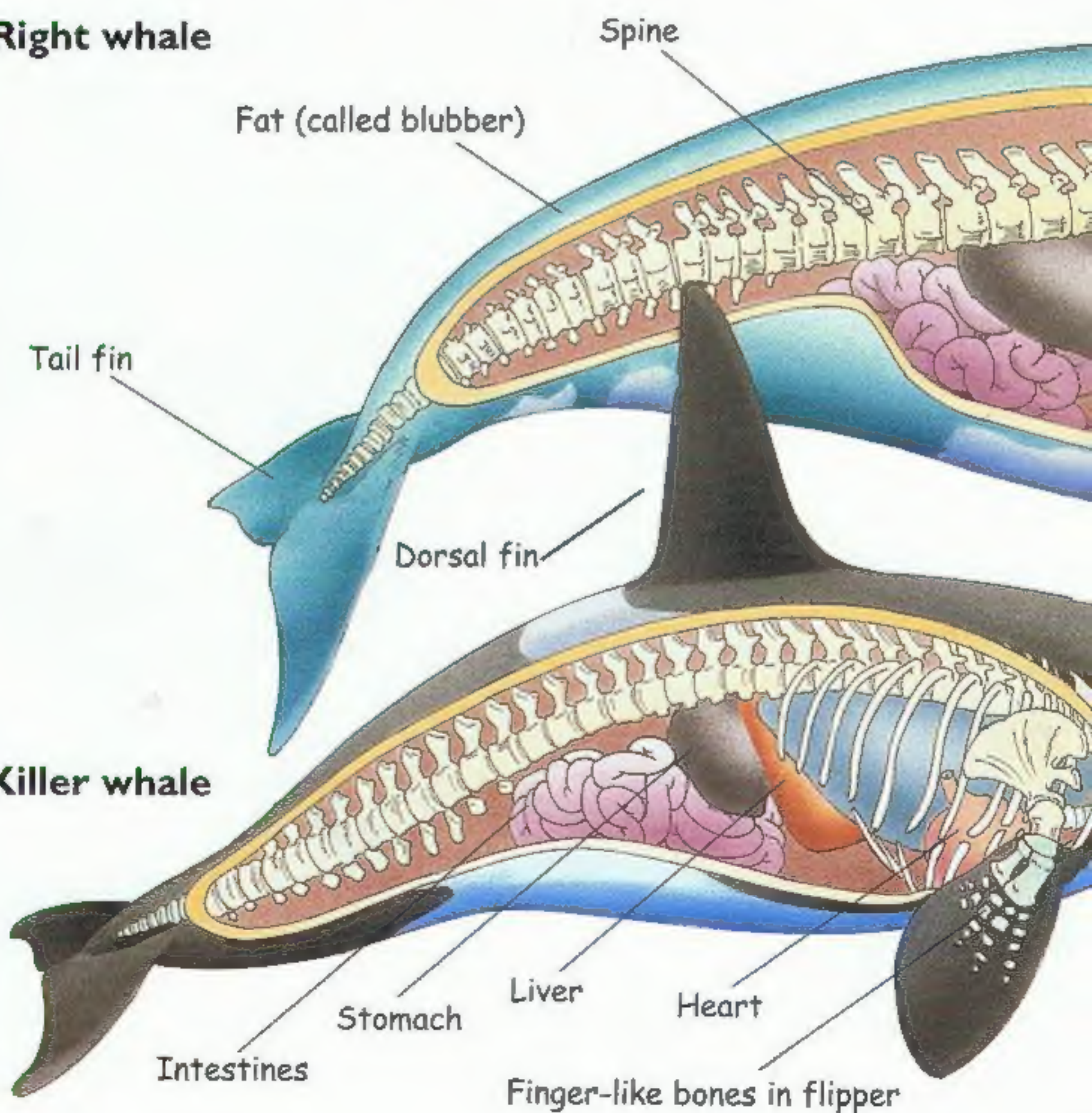
WHAT IS A WHALE?

Whales and dolphins may look like fish, but they are in fact **mammals**. Like humans, whales and dolphins are **warm-blooded**. The mothers give birth to their babies and feed the babies on milk. Whales, dolphins and porpoises together make up a group of sea creatures known as **cetaceans** (pronounced 'set-ace-ans').

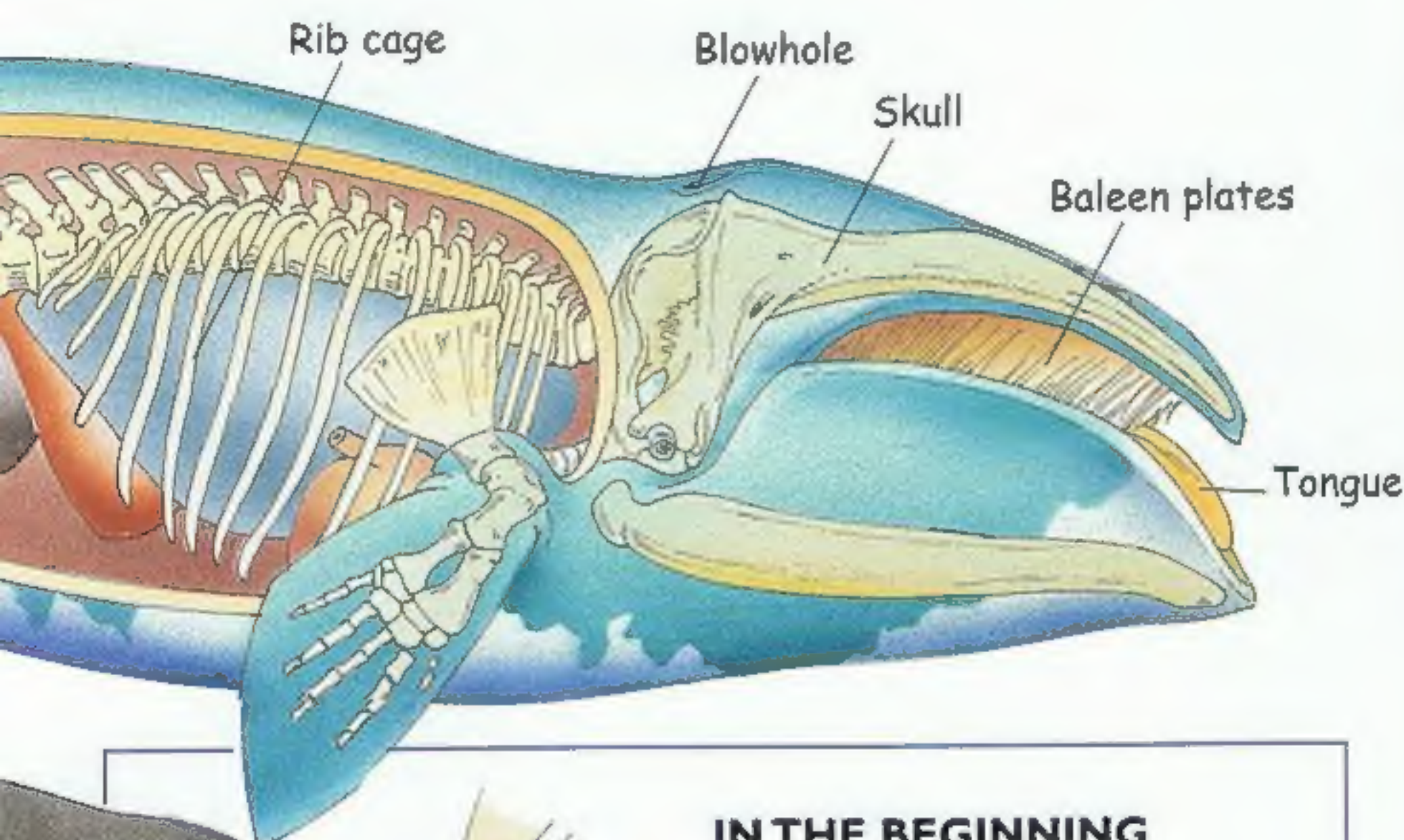
Right whale



Killer whale



Most experts agree that the earliest ancestors of today's cetaceans were wolf-like creatures which made their homes in estuaries, about fifty million years ago. At first these creatures hunted land animals but grew better at catching fish. They slowly changed as they left the land to live in the sea – all the oceans were theirs to explore.



IN THE BEGINNING

It is hard to imagine any connection between whales and animals that once walked on land. Yet there are clues. Five finger-like bones in the whale's flipper look very similar to the structure of a human hand. Also, a baby whale or dolphin, growing inside its mother, looks incredibly similar to an unborn human baby.

GRAZING WHALES

The ten species of **baleen whale** feed by filtering their food. Instead of teeth, their mouths have triangular **baleen plates** which sift tiny plants and animals from great scoops of sea water. A baleen whale's favourite food is krill, which are tiny shrimp-like creatures.

A whale without teeth

A humpback whale has grooves on its throat which stretch and allow the whale to take huge gulps of water.



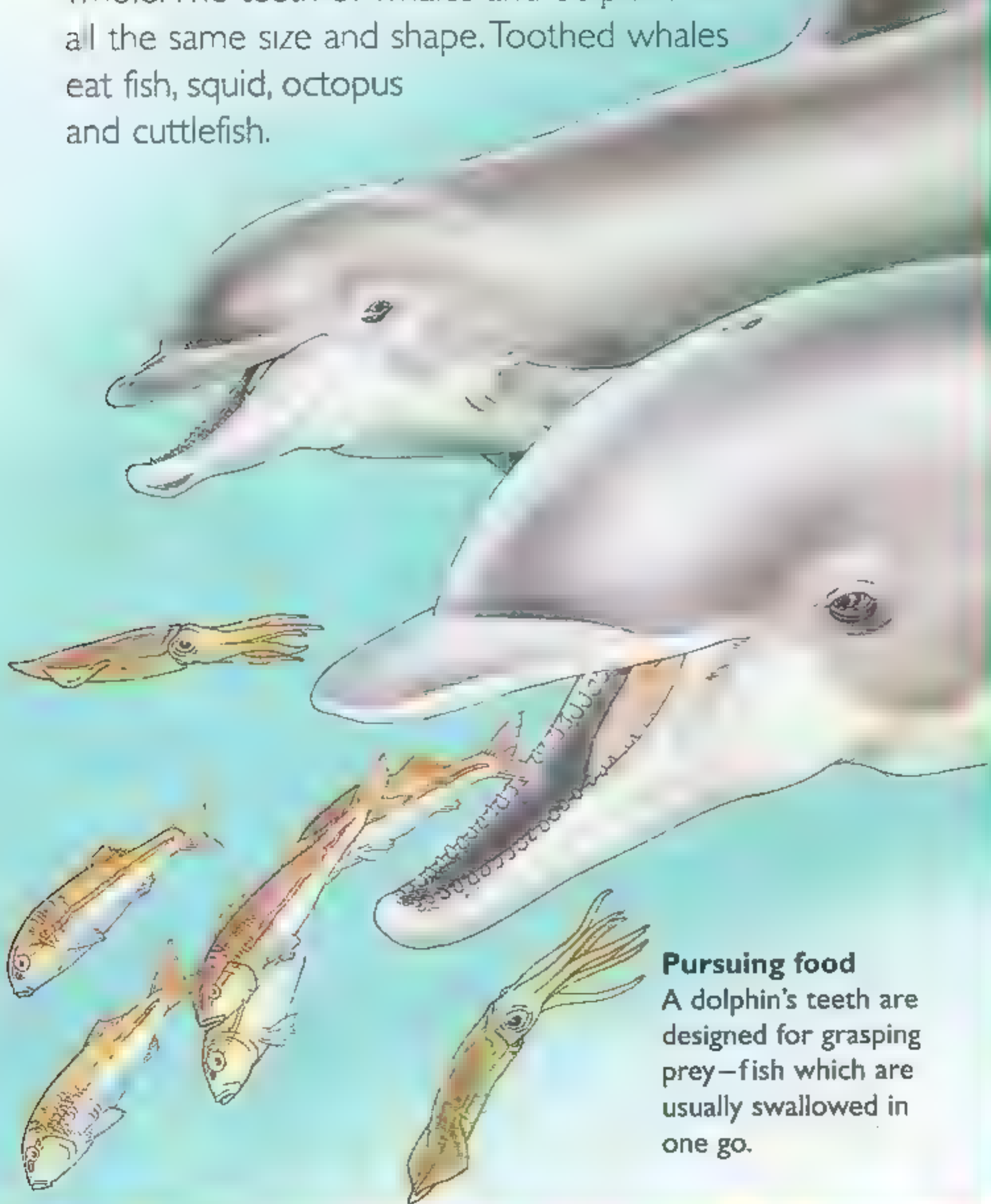
Baleen Plates



Baleen plates have a hairy fringe and are made from keratin, the substance that makes our fingernails hard.

TOOTHED WHALES

Apart from the baleen whales, all other whales and all dolphins and porpoises are hunters and have teeth. Most have sharp pointed teeth to catch and hold onto prey, which a whale or dolphin will swallow whole. The teeth of whales and dolphins are all the same size and shape. Toothed whales eat fish, squid, octopus and cuttlefish.



Pursuing food

A dolphin's teeth are designed for grasping prey—fish which are usually swallowed in one go.

LIFE CYCLE OF A BLUE WHALE

Birth

At birth, a baby blue whale weighs as much as an elephant! The baby is fed on its mother's milk. Together, they journey to summer feeding grounds near the poles.

One year old

The baby grows steadily. A one-year-old blue whale may already be two-thirds of its full adult size.

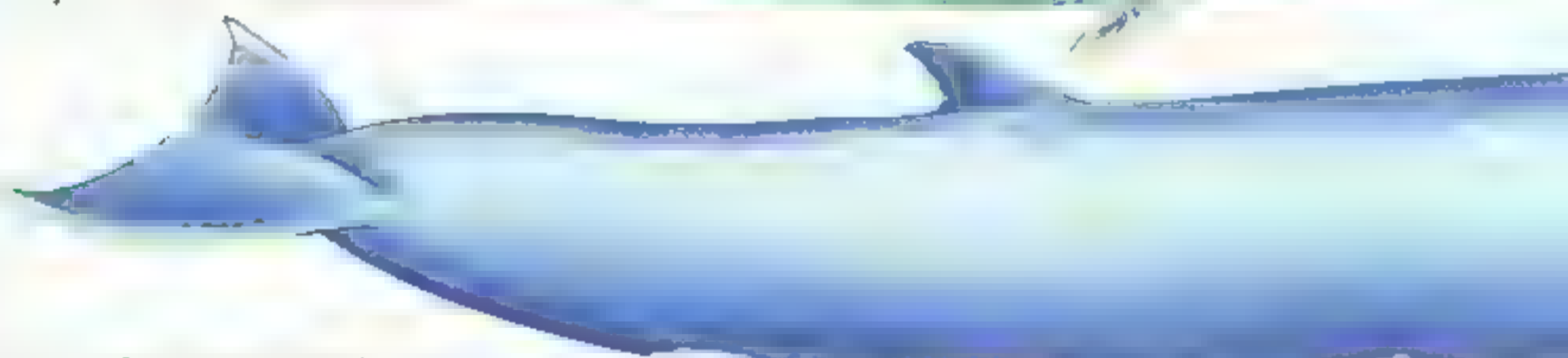
Birth - 7 metres



One year old - 16 metres



Five years old - 22 metres



Twenty-five years old - 26 metres



Five years old

When a blue whale is four or five years old, it has a growth spurt, but it does not reach adult size.

An adult blue whale

An adult whale reaches its maximum size when it is about twenty-five to thirty years old.

THE LARGEST CREATURE ON EARTH

The mighty blue whale is the most spectacular baleen whale. It is three times bigger than the largest known dinosaur. Its heart is about the size of a small car, and its tongue is heavier than an elephant!



An illustration of a Vaquita, a small cetacean with a grey body and a white underbelly. It is shown swimming towards the right.

Vaquita

This is the smallest of all cetaceans and also one of the most endangered. It is under two metres long. Found only in the Gulf of California, there may be fewer than a hundred vaquitas still alive. The vaquita is mainly grey and its mouth looks like lips!

An illustration of a Dall's porpoise, a dark grey cetacean with a white patch on its side. It is shown swimming towards the left.

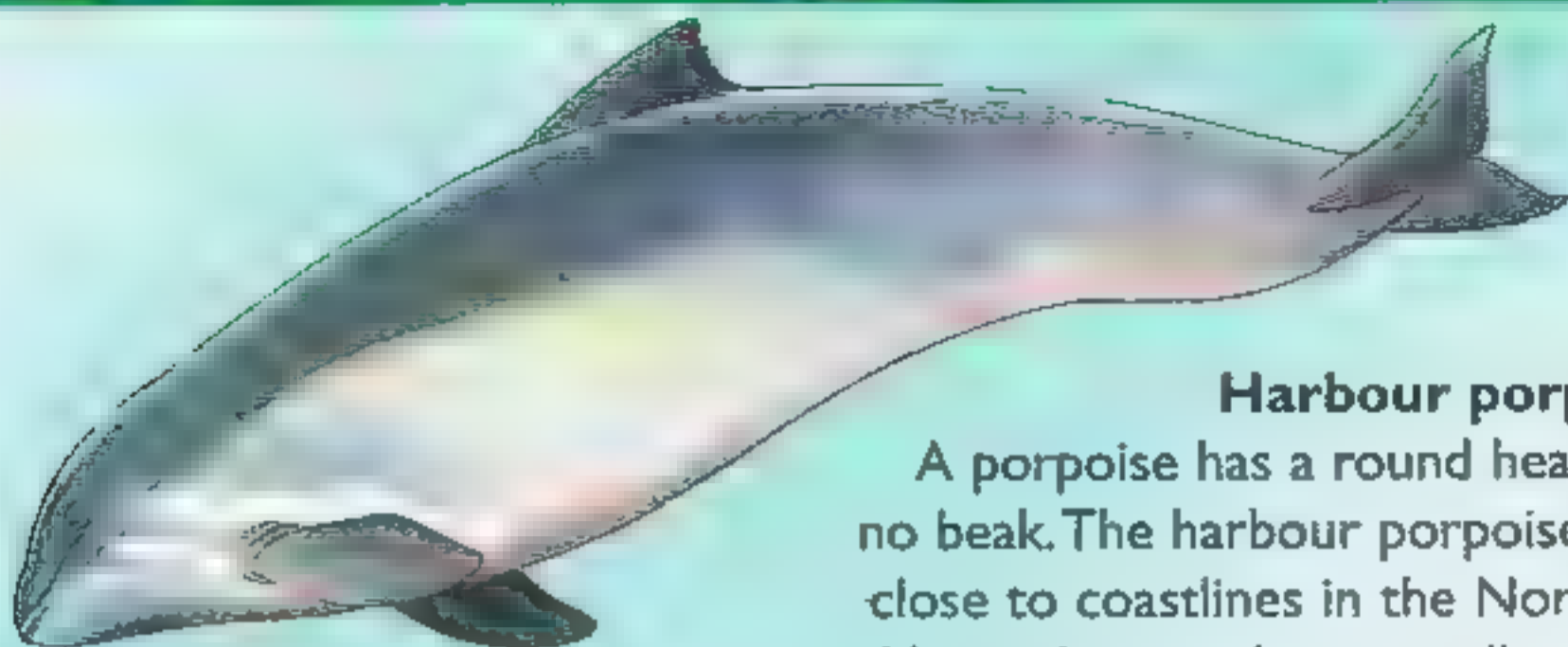
Dall's porpoise

Dall's porpoise is a deep diver and very fast swimmer. There may be as many as three million of these strikingly marked porpoises living along the coastlines of the North Pacific—here there are far more porpoises than whales and dolphins.

An illustration of a Common dolphin, a large cetacean with a grey body and a white underbelly. It is shown swimming towards the right.

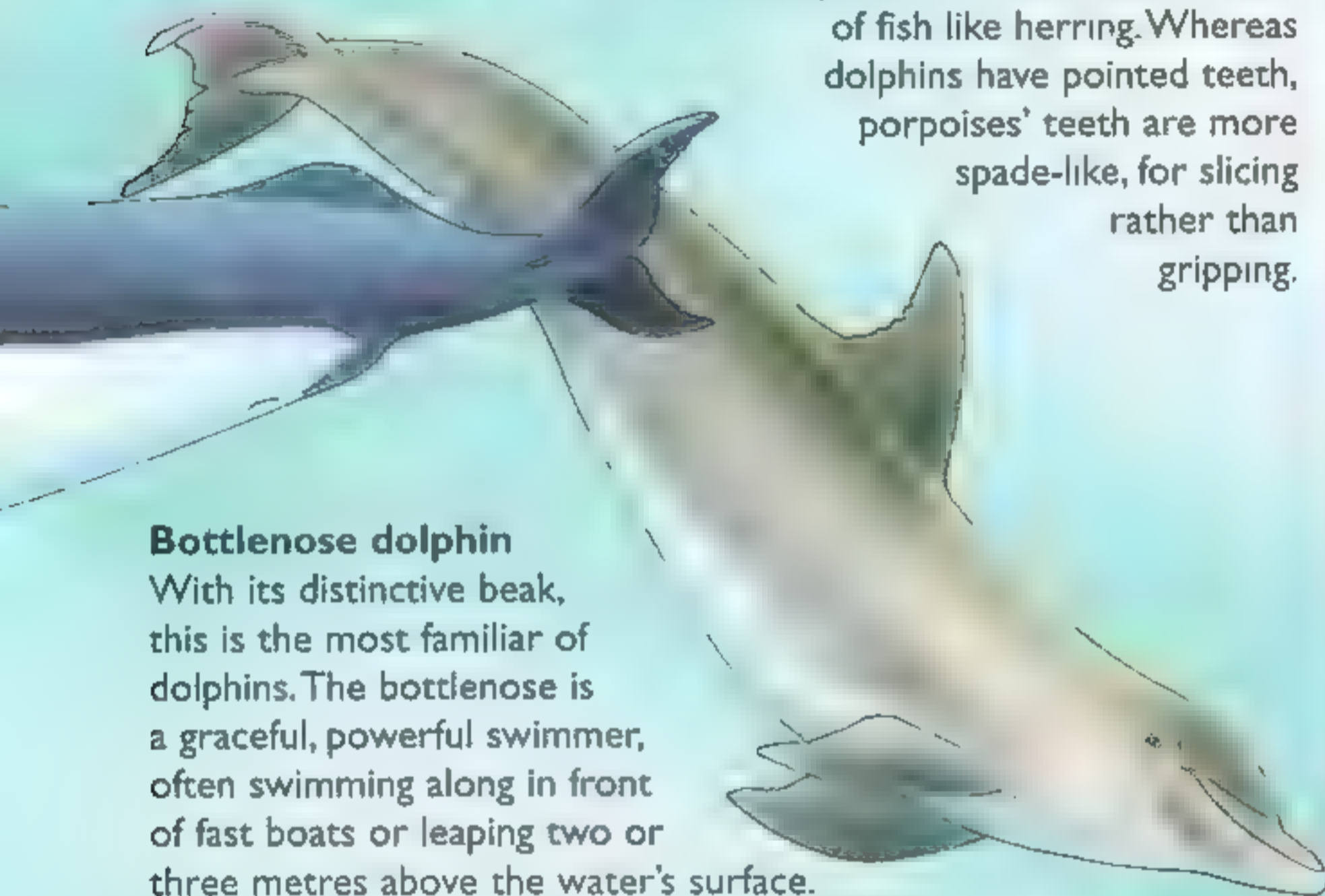
Common dolphin

This multi-coloured dolphin is slender and streamlined and lives in schools of twenty or thirty. Working within a team it catches food by swimming beneath a shoal of fish and forcing the fish to the surface.



Harbour porpoise

A porpoise has a round head and no beak. The harbour porpoise lives close to coastlines in the Northern Hemisphere and eats small schools of fish like herring. Whereas dolphins have pointed teeth, porpoises' teeth are more spade-like, for slicing rather than gripping.



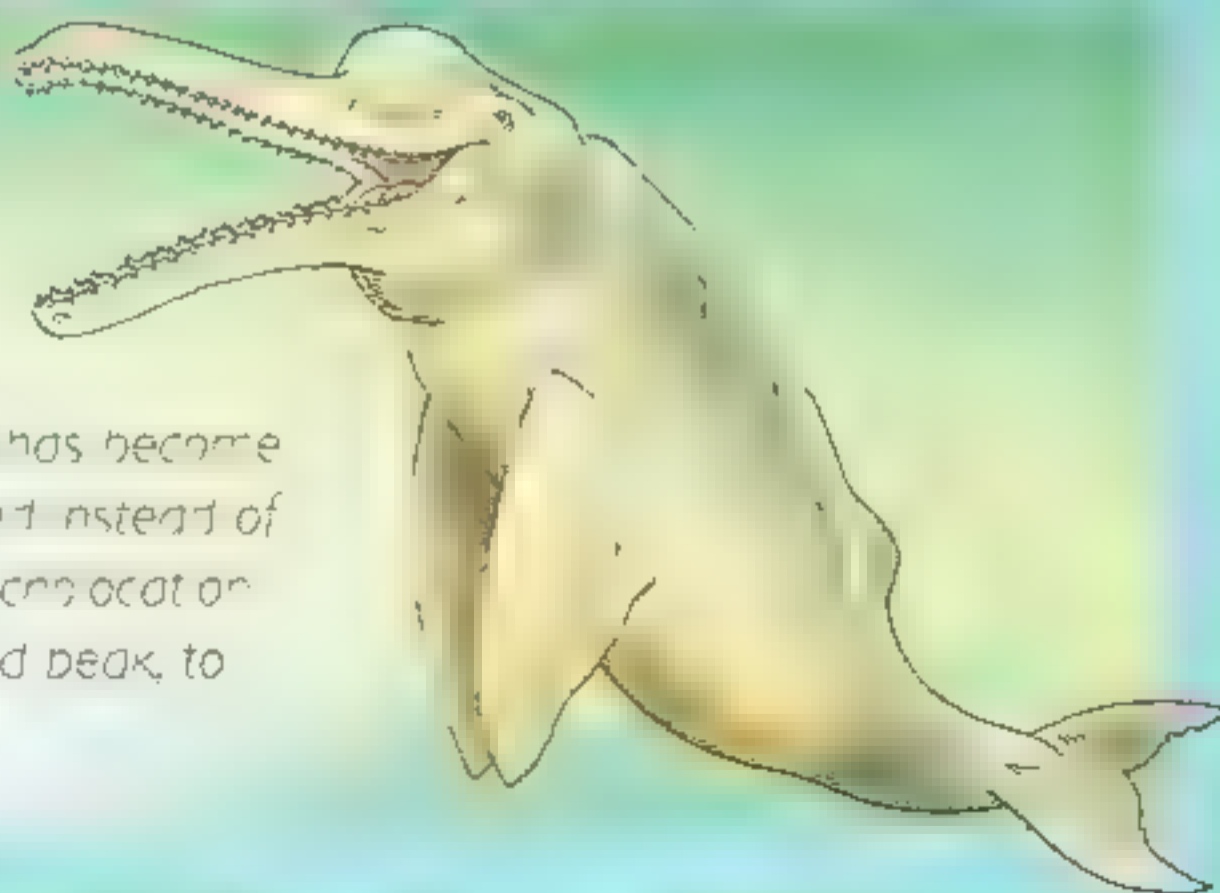
Bottlenose dolphin

With its distinctive beak, this is the most familiar of dolphins. The bottlenose is a graceful, powerful swimmer, often swimming along in front of fast boats or leaping two or three metres above the water's surface.

River dolphin

Five species of dolphin live mainly in rivers.

The rivers are so murky that the pink Amazon river dolphin has become almost completely blind and instead of using its eyes it relies on echolocation and its special long toothed beak to capture prey.



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Robin Hood

One day, Robin and his men were returning to camp. The track they were following came out into a broad meadow through which flowed a wide, deep stream. A fallen tree made a bridge.

As usual when crossing open ground, the outlaws were very cautious. Robin went first, hurrying towards the tree bridge. He was just turning to give a signal to the others to follow him, when they heard a loud shout from the far bank.

A tall, burly man stood with one foot on the fallen tree "One moment, friend!" he shouted. "I want to cross!"

"By all means!" Robin called back. "As soon as I've come over, the way is free for you to cross."

"No, no!" shouted the tall man. "I have right of way, as I have already set foot on the bridge. Step aside like a good fellow." And he laughed and twirled a long staff in front of him.

Robin unslung his bow. "I do not yield to threats!" he said angrily.

"Then let us dispute it man to man!" cried the other.

"But I am unarmed except for my staff. Bow against quarterstaff is hardly fair." He laughed again and thumped the end of the staff on the tree trunk.

Robin laid his bow and quiver on the ground. "Lend me your quarterstaff, Nic," he called. The outlaws came out into the open, and Nic tossed Robin his ash staff.

The two men advanced to the middle of the log. Robin's opponent gave a great laugh. "Now, archer, let's see you really fight!"

Robin used all his skill, but he could not land a single blow. Neither could the other, though he was a head taller and had a longer reach than Robin.

The forest echoed to the crack of staves as each man swung and parried. Then Robin slipped and lost his balance. With a resounding splash, he tumbled into the water.

The big man peered into the stream, where Robin's staff floated among the ripples. Robin was nowhere to be seen.

"I hope I haven't drowned your friend," he said to the outlaws. "I rather liked him..." His voice broke off with a yell as Robin, who had surfaced on the other side of the log, grabbed his ankle. Another splash, and the two of them stood up, waist deep, and waded, laughing, to the bank.

Robin pointed to the bridge. "The road is clear," he said. "You may continue on your way now."

"In a moment," said the man, "when I get my breath and empty my boots of water."

The outlaws crossed to join them. Nic asked the man, "Where are you bound?"



"To find my cousin," said the big man. "I heard he was in these parts. Wanted by the law. Trouble with a cheating Norman leather merchant. Arthur, they call him. Arthur Bland. Perhaps you've heard of him."

Robin and the outlaws roared with laughter. "Heard of him? He's one of our company!" said Robin.

"Then you must be Robin Hood!" exclaimed the big man, joining in the laughter. "I'm John Little, until recently a cattleman on a farm near Mansfield. I'm in much the same sort of trouble as cousin Arthur—a Norman steward got in the way of my fist! You're not recruiting, by any chance, are you, Master Hood?"

"Well," grinned Robin, "we do happen to have a vacancy for a fellow like yourself. You may join us on one condition. We are a merry company and fond of a joke. You will forget that you were ever John Little. From this day, you will be known as Little John. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said the new outlaw. "Little John I shall be... in name, if not in size or deed!"

Little John became a popular member of the band. None could be down at heart in his company, and he was a strong and fearless fighter. In time, he would become Robin Hood's right-hand man.

Poem by Jud Mitchell (aged 10)

I'm always afraid
To write what I feel,
I think everybody will laugh.
And when people
Laugh at me I could die.
I blush and I stutter,
I make things much worse,
I feel such a fool,
I could just swear and curse.

I'm always afraid
To write what I feel –
Because what I feel
Is just mine.
“They won't want to read it,”
I think to myself
“My sister will mock me
And laugh to herself.
And I can't bear it
When people just laugh.”
They're hurting me
Where it hurts most.

And then this new teacher—
She's here on supply—
Said she felt that way.
How she wanted to die
When she wrote down the thoughts
From her mind's highest loft
And people just laughed
And said, "Don't be soft!"
She said, "Those who laugh
Are 'kindness deprived',
They're probably lonely;
They probably don't have
Much self-esteem;
Perhaps nobody loves them.
Their pain is immense
And laughing's their only
Real form of defence."

"So remember," she told us,
"It's not you who's wrong
When you write what you feel
It's you who is strong!
You can't live in fear
As they have to do
Afraid of their feelings
So they have to make you
Feel equally afraid."

"So don't bother with rhymes—
Just bother about you
Just write what you feel
Just write what is true.
Don't worry what others
Might think or say—
Don't worry about line length
Or spelling things right,
Just try to be yourself
In all that you write."

I heard what she said,
It really struck home,
So how I have sat down
And written my poem.

Jud Mitchell (aged 10)

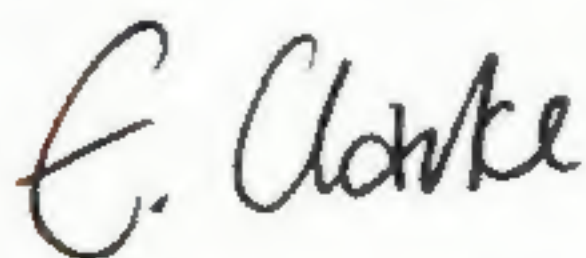
Mrs Clarke's report

Jud Mitchell had never written much before. When Jud first wrote this poem it wasn't as long as it is now. There were lots of spelling mistakes and there were some lines that didn't really make any sense.

It was written in class with a blunt pencil on scrap paper. I had told them to, "throw ideas down", and not to worry too much about neatness because I wanted them to be able to cross out, scribble in and improve things as they went along.

Jud's poem was scruffy. When the poem was half completed Jud wrote it up on the computer. We did a spell-check, and printed it out. I helped with the grammar and pointed out some mistakes that the spell-checker had missed. We both scribbled on the print-off. It was fun.

Jud revised the work seven times because each time we thought it was finished one of us noticed a mistake or thought of some new way to improve the layout. Some people would say we wasted seven pieces of paper, but as the poem improved it became clear that it was all worthwhile and I am proud of Jud for having learned to write.



Mrs Elizabeth Clarke (supply teacher)

Tom Sawyer

by Mark Twain
retold by Raymond Sibley
illustrated by Terry Gabbey

Whales and dolphins

by Mark Oakley
illustrated by Studio Boni/Galante and Lorenzo Pieri

Robin Hood

by John Grant
illustrated by Victor G Ambrus

Poem by Jud Mitchell and Mrs Clarke's report

by Louis Smith